PATTERNS OF POWER

First Nature

A Genealogy of Nation and Race — How the Most Modern of Hierarchies Made Itself the Oldest

THOMAS J. BRYAN

Preface

This volume completes a sequence of three, and follows the same move its companions followed. *Second Nature* traced the *economic* naturalisation of hierarchy — the warrants by which a made arrangement, property and the market, was converted into a nature beyond political argument. *Nature's Verdict* traced the *biological* naturalisation, the conversion of social inequality into a verdict of the struggle for existence. This volume traces the warrant that claims to be the most primordial of all: the nation and the race — blood and belonging, the identity a person is told he is simply born into, prior to all politics and beneath all argument. It is the warrant that presents itself as *first nature*, the original ground on which everything else is built.

And it is, of the three, the warrant whose claim to antiquity is most false. The nation and the race, which announce themselves as the oldest facts about a human being, are in truth among the newest of human inventions — assembled, in their modern form, within the last two and a half centuries, by identifiable people, out of identifiable materials, for identifiable purposes. The volume is the demonstration of that paradox and the tracing of the warrants by which the newest thing was made to look like the oldest: the manufactured antiquity of the nation, the cultural soul of the Volk, the invented biology of race, and the lethal weld of the two into a community of blood.

The account carries a double edge that no honest genealogy may suppress, and the volume holds it at the centre rather than choosing a side. The national idea has been at once the prison and the key — the warrant that built the racial state and murdered its minorities, and the same warrant, in its civic form, that armed the movements which broke the colonial empires and freed a third of humanity. What decides between the two is not the bare fact of nationhood but *which* warrant the nation is built upon: the open warrant of consent, which a stranger may join and a people may argue with, or the closed warrant of blood, which seals the community against the outsider and, pressed to its conclusion, ends in the grave. The volume sets the two against each other — Renan's nation of will against the nation of descent — because the distance between them is the whole moral weight of the history.

The verdict is hedged, as ever, by the genetic fallacy held at full strength. To show that the nation was made does not make it worthless; constructed things are among the most precious humanity has, and a nation can be a genuine home, a vessel of democracy, a real liberation. The genealogy disarms one thing only — the defence from nature, the claim that the nation or the race is a primordial fact placing its hierarchies and exclusions beyond human argument. It ends where its companions ended: by returning the verdict to politics.

A Note on This Collaboration

As throughout this series, the spine of the study is Thomas J. Bryan's and the documentary work is the model's, under the same disciplines: load-bearing specifics — the date a word was coined, the wording of a famous lecture, the claim of a founding text — are verified against the sources before they are asserted; public-domain originals (Renan, Gobineau, Blumenbach, Fichte, Herder) are quoted where the wording matters, and modern scholarship is paraphrased; and costs are counted on every side.

One feature of the method deserves notice in advance. The volume is deliberately unwilling to flatter a simple story in either direction. It will not let the national idea stand condemned as nothing but an engine of hatred, because the record shows the same idea freeing the colonised with the loaded word of self-determination; and it will not let it stand acquitted as mere harmless belonging, because the record shows where the warrant of blood, followed without flinching, has always arrived. It is fair, too, to the founders whose ideas were turned against their intentions — Herder the pluralist who dismissed race, Renan who refused it — for the warrant, once minted, does not stay loyal to its author. As ever, the volume holds its own central thesis the way it asks the reader to hold every claim that blood or nation is destiny: as something tested, not revealed.

The Argument in Eleven Parts

I — The World Before the Nation. Neither the modern nation nor the modern race is the eternal furniture of humanity; both have a birthday. The peasant of 1500 belonged to lord, faith, and village, not to a sovereign nation or a biological race. The thing to watch is the claim of antiquity itself, for it is always the tell.

II — The Newest Thing That Claimed to Be the Oldest. The modern nation was born with popular sovereignty in the democratic revolutions — and a community of millions of strangers had to be imagined, and, to command a life, had to be felt as ancient. So its antiquity was manufactured: traditions invented, histories written backward, a people assembled by school and census.

III — The Soul of the People. Herder gave the nation the warrant of culture — the Volk, the Volksgeist, the soul carried in language. Yet Herder was a pluralist who prized all peoples equally and dismissed race as worthless; the organic idea he forged was lifted from his hands and bent toward the hierarchy he refused.

IV — The Organic Nation. Under Fichte and the pressure of defeat the warm cultural nation acquired a boundary; a century of philologists, folklorists, and national historians built the nation's antiquity; and the bond of the Volk was quietly reconceived from culture — learnable, shareable — into blood.

V — The Invention of Race. The race-concept, too, is modern: assembled by Bernier, Linnaeus, and Blumenbach, who himself noted a dozen rival schemes and could not fix their number; hardened in the nineteenth century from environmental variety into biological hierarchy; and shaped throughout by the slavery and empire the construct was needed to justify.

VI — When the Nation Became a Race. The two tracks were welded into the community of blood — the völkisch idea. Gobineau's Aryan and Chamberlain's Teuton converted culture into ancestry and boundary into a barrier against pollution. The racial nation, unlike the civic or the cultural, can admit no stranger and cleanse no member: it is sealed at both ends.

VII — The Nation of Consent. The road not taken. Renan's 1882 lecture refused race, language, and blood and defined the nation as a daily plebiscite — a community of will, open and renewable, that a stranger may join and a people may argue with. The civic nation is the one that can be made just, because it can be argued with.

VIII — The Loaded Word. Self-determination, framed for Europe, was seized by the colonised and turned back on the empires that coined it: a universal word cannot be kept on a leash. The national idea is at once prison and key — the same warrant that sealed the racial state armed the liberations. Everything depends on whether the door is left open.

IX — The Racial State. The terminus. When a state takes the nation as a literal community of blood and itself as the purifier of that blood, the sealed community works its grammar out to the end — in the Nazi case to industrial murder, and in a wider pattern from the Armenians to Rwanda and Yugoslavia. This is the cost of the warrant that converts a community of will into a community of blood.

X — The Construct Revealed. The twentieth century's own sciences dissolved both warrants: genetics found no biological races — humanity is young, uniform, and clinal, with no lines to draw —

and history found the nation modern and made. What announced itself as first nature is in each case among the most modern of constructions.

XI — The Nation Returned to Politics. The warrant returns in new clothes — demography, the great replacement, a race-science with a genome — and the volume hands the reader not a side but a question. The genetic-fallacy caveat is held at full strength, and the series ends on its constant word: what men made, men may remake.

A Note on Sources

The volume draws on primary texts and on the modern scholarship of nationalism and race, treating the former as material to be quoted where the wording matters and the latter as material to be paraphrased.

The primary line. The argument rests on the founding texts themselves: Herder's writings on the Volk and the Volksgeist; Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation* (1808); the race-classifications of François Bernier (1684), Linnaeus, and Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (the 1795 coinage of "Caucasian"); Arthur de Gobineau's *Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races* (1853–55); Houston Stewart Chamberlain's *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* (1899); and, on the other side of the fork, Ernest Renan's *What Is a Nation?* (1882).

The construction of the nation. The modernist account stands on the founding works of nationalism studies, all published in 1983 — Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, Ernest Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism*, and Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition* — together with Anthony Smith's ethnosymbolist qualifications and the literature on print-capitalism, mass schooling, and the census.

Race, self-determination, and the terminus. The later parts draw on the histories of scientific racism and its instruments, on the modern genetic consensus and the American Anthropological Association's 1998 *Statement on Race* for the dissolution of biological race, on the scholarship of the Wilsonian moment and anti-colonial self-determination, and on the histories of the völkisch state and of the genocides from the Armenians to Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia.

The lineage. Throughout, the volume stands on its companions, *Second Nature* and *Nature's Verdict*, whose accounts of the economic and biological warrants it completes with the racial and national one, and on this project's analyses of the loaded word, of revealed versus tested belief, and of the case studies — von Trotha, Rom, Peters — in which the warrant of blood did its work on the ground.

PART I

THE WORLD BEFORE THE NATION

That neither the nation nor the race is the eternal furniture of humanity — that both have a birthday, and that the warrant which hides the birthday is the thing to watch

A peasant ploughing a field in Burgundy in the year 1500 was not, in any sense he would have recognised, a Frenchman. He was a subject of his lord, a son of the Church, a man of his village and his valley and his tongue, bound by oaths of fealty and faith to powers immediately above him; and the notion that he shared a deep and sovereign fellowship with a vine-grower in Provence or a fisherman in Brittany — that the three of them composed a single people, a *nation*, whose collective will was the rightful source of all authority and for which a man should be ready to die — would have struck him as a category without a referent. Loyalty in his world ran upward, to dynasty and to God, and sideways, to kin and parish, but not outward to an abstract community of millions of strangers he would never meet. That community did not yet exist to be loyal to.

Nor was he a member of a *race* in the sense the word would later carry. The Europe of 1500 knew lineages and faiths and peoples; it did not know humanity as a thing divided into a small number of bounded biological kinds, ranked by nature, with essences carried in the blood. The very word *race* meant something nearer to "lineage" or "breed" or "nation" in the loose old sense; its hard modern meaning — discrete, heritable, hierarchical, fixed by biology — would not be assembled for another two or three centuries.

The thing to watch

This volume is the third of a sequence, and it follows the same move its companions followed. The first traced the *economic* naturalisation of hierarchy, by which a made arrangement — property, the market — was handed warrant after warrant until it looked like nature; the second traced the *biological* naturalisation, the conversion of social inequality into a verdict of the struggle for existence. This volume traces the warrant that claims to be the most primordial of all: the nation and the race, blood and belonging, the identity a man is told he is simply *born into*, prior to all politics, beneath all argument, fixed before he drew breath. It is the warrant that presents itself as *first nature* — the original ground on which everything else is built.

And it is, of all the warrants, the one whose claim to antiquity is most false. For the nation and the race, which announce themselves as the oldest facts about a human being, are in truth among the newest of human inventions — assembled, in their modern form, within the last two and a half centuries, by identifiable people, out of identifiable materials, for identifiable purposes. The whole of what follows is the demonstration of that paradox, and the tracing of the warrants by which the newest thing was made to look like the oldest. The thing to watch, throughout, is the claim of antiquity itself, for it is always the tell. When an arrangement insists most loudly that it is primordial and natural and beyond the reach of choice, that is precisely the moment to ask who made it, and when, and for whom.

PART II

THE NEWEST THING THAT CLAIMED TO BE THE OLDEST

How the modern nation was born with popular sovereignty, and instantly imagined itself eternal — the construction, and the antiquity it manufactured

The modern nation has a birthday, and it falls in the age of the democratic revolutions. When the Americans declared that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, and when the French Revolution proclaimed that sovereignty resides essentially in *la Nation* and that no body and no individual may exercise authority that does not expressly proceed from it, something genuinely new entered the world. Legitimacy, which for a thousand years had descended from above — from God to the king to the subject — was turned upside down and made to ascend from below, from the people conceived as a single sovereign body, the nation. This was a revolutionary idea, and a liberating one; it is the ground of every democracy since. But it carried a problem in its foundations, and the problem generated the warrant.

The community that must be imagined

The problem is that a nation of millions cannot be *experienced*. A man can know his village; he cannot know his forty million co-nationals, the overwhelming majority of whom he will never meet, never see, never hear of as individuals. And yet he is asked to feel for them a solidarity deep enough to tax himself for their welfare and, at the limit, to die for them in war. A community on that scale, as the modern study of nationalism has established, must therefore be *imagined* — held in the mind as a thing felt rather than encountered, "an imagined community," in the phrase that has organised the field since 1983, conceived as both sovereign and bounded, a horizontal fellowship of strangers. The instruments of this imagining were themselves modern: the printing press and the newspaper, which let dispersed readers picture themselves moving through the same time and the same events; the standardised national language, which welded a hundred mutually-unintelligible dialects into one tongue; the mass school and the conscript army, which took in local children and peasants and stamped them out as Frenchmen and Germans and Italians.

The antiquity that had to be manufactured

Here is the decisive turn, and the heart of the warrant. A thing invented yesterday cannot command a man's life. To demand the supreme sacrifice, the nation had to be felt as ancient — as eternal, primordial, stretching back time out of mind, so that the living were merely the present custodians of an immemorial inheritance. And so, in the very decades when the nations were being assembled, their antiquity was *manufactured* to match. The nineteenth century was the great age of the invention of tradition: national epics were recovered or forged, folk costumes codified, anthems composed, "ancient" rituals devised and dated backward, national histories written that ran the modern nation in an unbroken line from the mists of prehistory. The scholars of nationalism have put the paradox at its sharpest: nationalism does not awaken nations that were sleeping; it *invents* nations where they did not exist, and then teaches them to remember a past they never had. The newest political community in the history of the world spent its first century persuading its members that it was the oldest. That manufactured antiquity is the first and most basic form of the warrant this volume tracks: the conversion of a thing plainly *made*, and made recently, into a nature that seems to have been there always.

PART III

THE SOUL OF THE PEOPLE

Herder, the Volk, and the warrant of culture — and how a pluralist who dismissed race supplied the idea that others would turn against him

The nation, once proclaimed, needed a content — an answer to the question of what, exactly, bound the strangers together. The French Revolution had given one answer, civic and political: the nation is the body of citizens, whoever they are, united by common laws and a common will. But another answer was forming in the German lands, deeper and warmer and far more dangerous, and its author was a gentle pastor-philosopher named Johann Gottfried Herder.

The warrant of culture

Herder, writing in the last third of the eighteenth century, gave the nation the warrant of *culture*. Against the cold Enlightenment universalism that treated all men as interchangeable bearers of a single abstract reason, he insisted that humanity exists only in its particular peoples — its *Völker* — and that each people possesses a unique inner character, a spirit, what came to be called the *Volksgeist*, expressed above all in its language and carried in its folk-songs, its poetry, its customs, its inherited ways of seeing the world. A people was not a contract of individuals but an organic growth, a living thing with a soul, and its language was that soul made audible; to lose the mother tongue was to lose the self. This was a profound and in many ways a beautiful idea, and it founded whole disciplines — folklore, comparative philology, cultural anthropology all descend from it. But it relocated the essence of the nation from the political surface, where it could be chosen and amended, to a cultural-organic depth, where it was simply *given* — a second and richer warrant of nature laid beneath the political one.

The warrant that outran its author

And here the genealogy must record an irony it has met before, the irony by which a founder's situated idea is canonised, inherited, and turned to purposes he would have abhorred. For Herder himself was no nationalist in the later sense, and emphatically no racist. He prized the *plurality* of peoples as a garden prizes the variety of its flowers; he held that every culture was a valid and complete expression of humanity, none above another; he opposed conquest and the imposition of one people's ways upon another; he denounced the cruelties of empire and slavery; and in his original writings he dismissed the dividing of mankind into *races* as a crude and worthless notion, holding the human species to be biologically one. The man who gave Europe the idea of the organic, language-bearing Volk meant by it a doctrine of equal dignity and mutual respect among the peoples of the earth.

It did not stay his. Over the following century the warrant he forged was lifted out of his pluralist hands and bent toward the opposite of everything he intended: the unique soul of the Volk became the superior soul of *one* Volk; the cultural community became a community of blood; the garden of equal flowers became a hierarchy with a master at its head. Herder supplied the premise — that a people is an organic essence carried in its inheritance — and others supplied the conclusion he had refused to draw. This is the recurring mechanism of the whole series: the warrant, once minted, does not stay loyal to the purposes of the one who struck it. It goes to whoever can use it.

Part IV

THE ORGANIC NATION

Fichte, the hardening of the Volk, and the century of scholars who built the nation's antiquity and then began to fill its veins with blood

The bending began in earnest under the pressure of defeat. In the winter of 1807 to 1808, with Prussia crushed and Berlin occupied by Napoleon's army, the philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte delivered his *Addresses to the German Nation* — and in them the warm cultural nation of Herder acquired a harder edge and a boundary. Fichte addressed himself to the Germans as a single people defined and sealed by their language, an *original* people whose living tongue made them, he claimed, more authentically themselves than their neighbours; and he summoned this people to a spiritual regeneration that would be, in time, indistinguishable from a national awakening. The pluralism was draining out. What had been one valid culture among many was becoming a culture with a destiny and a frontier, and the frontier was drawn by speech and, increasingly, by descent.

The builders of antiquity

Through the nineteenth century an army of scholars and enthusiasts laboured, mostly in good faith, to give the awakening nations the deep past their dignity seemed to require. The philologists reconstructed the ancestral languages and arranged the peoples of Europe into great linguistic families. The folklorists — the brothers Grimm foremost — gathered the tales and songs of the countryside and published them as the authentic voice of the Volk, the nation's soul recovered from the peasants who had kept it. The historians wrote the national epics of the past, running the modern fatherland back through the medieval kingdoms to the tribes of antiquity in a single unbroken bloodline of belonging. Composers set the nation to music; painters gave it landscapes; architects gave it a revived medieval style in which to house its parliaments. All of this was the manufacture of the antiquity described in the previous part — the furnishing of the new house with ancestral portraits, most of them painted last week.

Blood enters the veins

But across the same century a fateful substitution was working its way through the idea. The bond of the Volk, which for Herder had been *culture* — language, memory, custom, things in principle learnable and shareable — began to be reconceived as *biology*: not what a people knows and sings and remembers, but what flows in its veins; not heritage but heredity. The organic metaphor, at first a figure of speech for cultural continuity, hardened into a literal claim about blood and descent. By the later decades of the century the spiritual Volksgeist of the philosophers was being recast, in a swelling current of thought, as a material racial substance — and to follow that recasting we must turn to the parallel track on which the modern idea of race was, over the same long period, being separately built.

PART V

THE INVENTION OF RACE

That the race-concept, too, is modern — assembled by Enlightenment naturalists, hardened into biological hierarchy by the nineteenth century, and shaped throughout by the uses it was needed for

The idea of race feels, to those raised inside it, like the most obvious of perceptions — a plain seeing of differences that are simply there. It is in fact a construction, and a datable one, assembled by particular men in particular centuries, and the record of its assembly is one of the clearest demonstrations that what presents itself as a reading of nature is very often a writing upon it.

The classifiers

The modern race-concept does not appear before the late seventeenth century. Its first clear articulation is usually dated to 1684, when the French traveller François Bernier published a short essay dividing the earth's peoples into a few great kinds by physical type — and even he allowed that climate and environment did much of the shaping. The great Swedish systematiser Carl Linnaeus, classifying all of nature in the 1730s, slotted humanity into four geographic varieties. And the man often called the father of physical anthropology, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, working at the century's end, produced the scheme that would prove most durable: five varieties of mankind, to one of which — the European, west-Asian, and north-Indian — he gave, in 1795, a brand-new name, *Caucasian*, on the curious ground that the most beautiful skulls in his collection came from the region of the Caucasus. Two things about Blumenbach repay attention, because both betray the construct beneath the science. First, he held the differences to be products of climate, nutrition, and custom rather than fixed innate essences, and he insisted that mankind was a single species. And second — this is the quiet confession at the root of the whole enterprise — he himself noted that a dozen rival classifications were already in the field, dividing humanity into anywhere from three kinds to a dozen, and all but invited his reader to take whichever he preferred. The number of human races has never been agreed, in three centuries of trying, for the simple reason that there is no fact of the matter to be found; there are only schemes, and the choosing of one is an act of the chooser, not a discovery in the world.

The hardening, and the need it served

What the eighteenth century proposed as a loose and largely environmental taxonomy, the nineteenth century hardened into something rigid, biological, and hierarchical. Difference ceased to be a matter of climate and became a matter of innate and permanent essence; the varieties became fixed types arranged on a ladder, with the classifier's own kind, by a coincidence that recurs in every such scheme, installed at the top. And the hardening did not proceed in a vacuum of pure curiosity. It proceeded alongside, and in the service of, the Atlantic slave trade and the expansion of European empire — institutions that profited enormously from the proposition that the people they bought, sold, and conquered belonged to a lower order of humanity whom nature had fitted for the role. The construct followed the need. A civilisation that proclaimed the rights of man and simultaneously held millions in bondage and dominion required a way to place the enslaved and the colonised outside the circle of "man," and race supplied it: a line drawn through humanity and then attributed to biology, so that the drawing should look like a finding and the profit like the order of nature.

PART VI

WHEN THE NATION BECAME A RACE

The fusion of the two tracks — how the cultural Volk and the biological race were welded into the community of blood, and the warrant reached its most lethal form

The two tracks now converge, and their convergence is the dark centre of this genealogy. The nineteenth century took the cultural nation it had built on one track and the biological race it had built on the other and welded them into a single object: the nation conceived not as a community of citizens (the French answer) nor even as a community of culture (Herder's answer) but as a community of *blood* — a race that happened to have a flag, a state that was the political body of a breed. This is the *völkisch* idea in its mature and poisonous form, and once the weld was made, everything the cultural nation had claimed for itself could be reclaimed as biology: the antiquity became an ancestry, the soul became a bloodline, the boundary became a barrier against pollution, and belonging became a matter not of will or culture but of descent, ineradicable and unchooseable, carried in the body and inherited at birth.

The prophets of blood

The texts that performed the weld are identifiable. In the 1850s a disenchanted French aristocrat, Arthur de Gobineau, published his *Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races*, which took the linguistic category "Aryan" — properly a family of languages — and converted it into a master race, the white and only truly creative race, whose vitality history was steadily squandering through the fatal sin of *race-mixing*; civilisations rose, on Gobineau's account, by racial purity and fell by miscegenation, and the future was therefore one of inevitable decline as the blood of the noble race was diluted. Gobineau was gloomy; his readers made him useful. Translated into German and taken up in the circle around Richard Wagner at Bayreuth, his racial pessimism was reforged by the Anglo-German writer Houston Stewart Chamberlain, whose *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* (1899) supplied the missing optimism: the Aryan, and specifically the Teutonic, race was the bearer of all that was highest in civilisation, locked in a world-historical struggle against a corrupting racial enemy whom Chamberlain, with a venom Gobineau had largely lacked, identified as the Jew. The cultural nationalism of the philosophers had become a racial mysticism with a hero and a villain, a chosen people and a poison — and it had become, in the process, a programme.

What the weld made possible

It is worth marking precisely what the fusion accomplished, because it is the reason this warrant is the most dangerous of the three the series has traced. The civic nation can admit a stranger: citizenship can be granted, an oath sworn, a new member made. The cultural nation can, with effort, assimilate one: a language can be learned, customs adopted, a heritage joined. But the racial nation can do *neither*. If the nation is blood, then the outsider can never become an insider however he tries, for he cannot change his descent; and the insider deemed to carry the wrong blood can never be cleansed of it, however loyal, however assimilated, however many generations deep. The community of blood is sealed at both ends. There is no door in or out. And a community with no door has, in the last resort, only one way to deal with the bodies it has defined as not belonging and cannot expel into belonging: their removal. The logic of the racial nation runs, by its own internal grammar, toward purification — and purification, pressed to its conclusion, is a synonym the twentieth century taught us to read.

PART VII

THE NATION OF CONSENT

Renan and the road not taken — the civic answer that defined the nation as a daily plebiscite and refused the warrant of blood

It would falsify the whole history to present the racial nation as the only nineteenth-century answer, or as the inevitable one. There was a rival answer, articulated with great clarity at the height of the racial current, and it represents the genuine fork in the road — the place where the national idea might have been, and in places was, something other than a warrant of blood. Its classic statement was given in 1882, in a lecture at the Sorbonne by the French scholar Ernest Renan, under the title *What Is a Nation?*

A daily plebiscite

Renan set out to refute, point by point, every attempt to ground the nation in an objective, given, natural fact — and the attempts he refuted are exactly the warrants this volume has been tracing. A nation, he insisted, is not a race: "race is not everything," he wrote, "as it is among rodents and felines," and the great nations of Europe were in fact mongrel to the core, the products of centuries of conquest and mixture in which no pure stock survived. Nor is a nation a language, nor a religion, nor a geography of rivers and mountains, nor the dynastic property of any prince. What, then, is it? It is, Renan answered, a *spiritual principle*, a "soul" — but a soul of an entirely voluntary kind, constituted by two things only: a shared inheritance of memory, and a present, freely-willed desire to go on living a common life. "A nation's existence," he wrote, in the sentence for which the lecture is remembered, "is a daily plebiscite" — an existence renewed, like an individual's, by perpetual affirmation, and never finally fixed. A nation, on this account, is *made and unmade*; it is held together by consent and dissolved by its withdrawal; a province belongs to a nation not by blood or by historic right but only insofar as its people will to belong, for a nation "has no more right than a king" to seize a people that does not consent.

The two warrants, and the cost of forgetting

Here, then, stand the two answers side by side, and the whole moral weight of the history hangs on the distance between them. The racial nation is a community of blood: involuntary, sealed, unchooseable, a fact of birth that no act of will can alter, with no door in and, for those marked as alien, no exit but removal. The civic nation is a community of will: voluntary, open, renewable, a daily choice that a stranger may join by consenting and a member may shape by arguing, grounded not in nature but in agreement. The first claims the authority of biology and is therefore beyond politics; the second claims only the authority of consent and is therefore *nothing but* politics — which is to say, amendable, contestable, and human. Renan's nation is the one that can be made just, because it can be argued with. It is the road that leads away from the camps. Honesty requires adding that Renan saw, too, the unlovely thing at the bottom even of his civic nation — that it rests on a shared *forgetting*, that every nation is built upon the deliberate amnesia of the violence of its own founding, and that historical inquiry, by recovering that violence, is always a mild danger to the nation it studies. The civic nation is not innocent. But it is open, and openness is the whole of the difference, for a community one can join and argue with is a community one need not be purified from.

PART VIII

THE LOADED WORD

Self-determination, and the national idea as both prison and key — how the warrant built to bound peoples became the weapon the bounded turned against their masters

The national idea has a double character that no honest genealogy can suppress, and it is sharpest in a single word. For the same warrant that sealed the racial nation and licensed its purifications was also, in its civic and self-determining form, the most powerful instrument of liberation the modern world has known — and the proof lies in the career of the phrase *national self-determination*.

The word and its escape

The principle that a people has the right to govern itself, to be free of foreign rule, was framed by its European authors for European purposes: it was meant to redraw the map of a defeated continent after the First World War, to free the subject nations of the fallen empires of Austria and the Ottomans, and it was proclaimed most loudly by an American president, in his programme of 1918, as a principle of the postwar settlement. Its authors did not, for the most part, mean it to apply beyond Europe; the colonised peoples of Asia and Africa were not, in the minds of the statesmen who drew the new borders, the kind of "nations" the principle had in view. But a universal word cannot be kept on a leash. The moment self-determination was proclaimed as a right of nations, the question answered itself: *which* nations? And the colonised seized the word and turned it back upon the very powers that had spoken it. If nations have a right to rule themselves, why not the Egyptians, the Indians, the Vietnamese, the Africans? A young Vietnamese in Paris pressed the principle on the peacemakers and was ignored, and went home to become Ho Chi Minh; across Asia and Africa the same word lit the same fuse, and over the following half-century the empires that had coined the principle were dismantled by it. This is the mechanism the series calls the *loaded word*: a ruling order's legitimating language, because it must be stated in universal terms to legitimate at all, outruns its authors and becomes a pry-bar in the hands of the excluded.

The same warrant, the opposite face

So the national warrant wears two faces, and they are the same warrant. The conviction that humanity is properly organised into nations, each with a right to its own collective existence, built the racial state that murdered its minorities — and it armed the liberation movements that broke the colonial empires and freed a third of humanity from foreign rule. The idea was, at once, the prison and the key. This is not a paradox to be resolved by choosing a side; it is the structure of the thing, and the genealogy reports it because it is true. What determines whether the national idea liberates or murders is not the bare principle of nationhood but *which warrant* the nation is built upon — the open warrant of consent, which can free a people without sealing it against its neighbours and its own minorities, or the closed warrant of blood, which frees one people only by defining others as enemies within. The word is the same. Everything depends on whether the door is left open.

PART IX

THE RACIAL STATE

The terminus — where the warrant of blood, pursued to its conclusion, has always arrived: the purification of the nation by the removal of those defined as outside it

Every warrant in this series has a terminus, a place it reaches when nothing restrains it, and the racial nation's terminus is the most terrible in modern history. The genealogy has shown the logic; this part records where the logic led.

The state as a body to be purified

When a state takes the racial nation as its literal foundation — when it declares that the political community simply *is* a community of blood, and that its highest task is the health and purity of that blood — then the whole apparatus of the modern state, its science and its bureaucracy and its police, is turned to a single end: the identification, separation, and ultimately the removal of the bodies defined as alien or corrupting. The Nazi state was the pure case, the völkisch fusion of nation and race made total and given the machinery of a twentieth-century government. Its racial laws sorted the population by descent; its propaganda taught the people to see a fellow-citizen of the wrong ancestry as a poison in the national bloodstream; and the internal grammar of the sealed community — the grammar this volume traced in the sixth part, the community with no door — worked itself out to its conclusion in the murder of six million Jews and of Roma, of the disabled, of all whom the warrant of blood had defined as unworthy of life. It is essential to the genealogy's honesty to say that this was not the awakening of an ancient hatred alone, though hatred was its fuel; it was the *application of a doctrine* — the doctrine, assembled across the preceding century by Gobineau and Chamberlain and the racial scientists, that the nation is a biological substance and the state its purifier. The camps were where the warrant of blood, followed without flinching to its end, was always going to arrive.

The pattern beyond the pure case

Nor was the pure case the only case. The conviction that the nation is a community of descent that must be made homogeneous — that a territory rightfully belongs to one people and that the others on it are intruders to be removed — drove a century of atrocities that share a single structure: the deportation and massacre of the Armenians by a state remaking itself as an ethnic nation; the vast bloodletting of Partition, when a subcontinent was divided along the line of religious community and millions were killed or driven from homes their families had held for centuries; the slaughter in Rwanda, where a racial distinction sharpened and hardened under colonial rule became, in a hundred days, the script for genocide; the "ethnic cleansing" — the phrase itself is the warrant speaking — of the Yugoslav wars. In each the engine was the same: the belief that the nation is a body of blood, that a mixed population is an impurity, and that the remedy for impurity is removal. This is the cost, counted in the only currency that finally matters, of the warrant that converts a community of will into a community of blood. It is why the distinction drawn in the seventh part is not an academic nicety but the difference between a politics one can live inside and a logic that ends in a grave.

PART X

THE CONSTRUCT REVEALED

How the modern sciences of biology and history dissolved the warrant — race shown to have no biological reality, the nation shown to be modern and made

The warrant has now been traced from its assembly to its terminus. It remains to record its dissolution — the demonstration, by the twentieth century's own sciences, that the two things which claimed to be the deepest and oldest facts about a human being are neither old nor, in the sense claimed, facts at all.

Race has no biological reality

Take race first, on its own chosen ground of biology. When the tools at last existed to test the claim directly — to read the actual genetic variation of the human species — the racial model collapsed. Human beings are an extraordinarily young and uniform species, descended from African ancestors of the recent evolutionary past, and they share more than ninety-nine per cent of their genetic material with one another. The variation that remains is overwhelmingly *within* the conventional racial groups rather than between them, and it is distributed not in discrete packages but as gradual gradients across geography, shading continuously from place to place with no lines anywhere to be drawn. There are no biological races — no bounded, internally-uniform, sharply-distinguished human kinds of the sort the warrant requires. The categories that three centuries of classifiers fought over, never agreeing on their number, turned out to correspond to nothing in the biology; they were lines drawn on a continuum by human hands, for human purposes, and then attributed to nature. The great scientific bodies have said so plainly: race, as a biological category, is not a discovery about the species but a social classification laid upon it. The thing presented as the bedrock of nature is a thing made by society and projected onto the body.

The nation is modern and made

And the nation, examined by the historians, proved equally constructed and far younger than it claimed. The whole apparatus of its supposed antiquity — the immemorial traditions, the ancient bloodline, the eternal people stretching back beyond memory — dissolved on inspection into the nineteenth-century manufacture this volume described: traditions invented, histories written backward, languages standardised, peoples assembled by school and census and conscription out of populations that had not previously imagined themselves as one. The nation is real, as the market is real and property is real — it organises lives, commands loyalties, makes history. But it is real the way a made thing is real, not the way a law of nature is real; it was built, recently, and could have been built otherwise, and is still being rebuilt. Both warrants, then, stand exposed by the same finding: what announced itself as *first nature*, the primordial pre-political ground, is in each case among the most modern of human constructions. The oldest-seeming fact about a person — the blood, the nation, the people he was simply born into — turns out to have been made, and made within living memory of his grandparents.

PART XI

THE NATION RETURNED TO POLITICS

The warrant in new clothes, the genetic fallacy held at full strength, and the conclusion the whole series has been driving toward

The exposure did not end the warrant; warrants are never ended, only re-dressed, and the closing part must record both the new clothes and the limits of what the genealogy claims.

The return in new clothes

After 1945 the open language of race and blood became, for a time, unspeakable in respectable company, driven underground by the spectacle of where it had led. It did not die; it changed costume. The warrant of blood returns now in the vocabulary of *demography* and *culture* and *heritage* — in the conspiracy of a "great replacement," which recodes the old fantasy of racial pollution as a statistical anxiety about birth-rates and migration; in a revived race-science that swaps the calipers for the genome and proposes, once again, to find in biology the ranking it has decided in advance to look for; in a politics of "civilisation" that draws the old blood-boundary in the new ink of religion and values. The costume changes; the cut is the one this volume has traced throughout — a community defined by an unchooseable inheritance, sealed against the stranger, and placed beyond the reach of the politics that might open it. And this must be said without partisanship, for the warrant belongs to no single faction and no single country: the impulse to ground the nation in blood and to seal it against the outsider has been the property of regimes and movements of every stripe, and it recurs wherever a people is taught to feel itself a body to be kept pure rather than a community to be argued with. The reader is handed not a side but a question, to put to whoever offers him a nation defined by who may not belong to it: is this a community I am being invited to *join*, or a body I am being recruited to keep *clean*?

The verdict returned to politics

What, finally, does the genealogy claim, and what does it refuse? It refuses, at full strength, the genetic fallacy. To show that the nation was made does not make it worthless, any more than showing that a cathedral was built makes it ugly; constructed things are among the most precious humanity has, and a nation can be a genuine community of solidarity, a vessel of democracy, a home. To show that a nation is modern is not to say that every national project is a fraud; the anti-colonial nations that freed themselves with the loaded word were real liberations, and the civic nation of consent is one of the great inventions of human freedom. The genealogy disarms one thing, and one only — the *defence from nature*, the claim that the nation or the race is a primordial biological fact that places its hierarchies, its exclusions, and its violence beyond the reach of human argument. That claim was always false. The blood was a metaphor hardened into a lie; the antiquity was manufactured; the race was a line drawn on a continuum and blamed on nature. What men assembled, recently and for their purposes, men may also disassemble, amend, and rebuild.

And so the series ends where its companions ended, on the same word. The market that called itself nature was made; the hierarchy that called itself the verdict of biology was made; and the nation and the race that call themselves *first nature*, the oldest and deepest ground of who a person is, were made too — later than almost anything else a person believes about himself, by hands we can name, for reasons we can read. To know this is to be handed back the thing the warrant exists to take away: the knowledge that belonging is a human arrangement and not a natural fate, that a people is a community of will and not a prison of blood, and that what was made by politics may be returned to politics — argued with, opened, and made just — by a people that has remembered it was made.